

## Rita not another Katrina

VA facilities survived Hurricane Rita, the impressive storm system that swept through Texas and Louisiana coastal areas on the heels of its catastrophic sister, Katrina.

VA facilities prepared for the worst, closing clinics, postponing appointments, and evacuating patients. In addition, emergency supplies, staff, and other resources were in place and deployed to respond to the storm.

VA Medical Centers in Houston and Alexandria remained operational. VA is in the process of assessing any damage to outpatient clinics in the area. The storm caused major flooding and power outages in the region.

"This was a major storm. We prepared for Rita as we did Katrina. We're still assessing Rita's effects on our VISN. However, we have not seen the type of damage as we did from Katrina. Our employees were once again prepared," said Robert Lynch, M.D., network director. "We reached out and made sure veterans in community nursing homes were safe and received shelter and essential medical care."

Indeed, the Alexandria VA Medical Center led the evacuation of 100 elderly veteran patients from Martin de Porres Community Nursing Home and Chenannault Residential Care Facility based in Lake Charles to a staging area in Alexandria.

The patients were moved in anticipation of Hurricane Rita to temporary shelters in Alexandria at Bolton High and Alexandria Senior High Schools.

The patients are being relocated to sites within the region to ensure adequate medical and mental health care is provided.

## New Orleans Credit Union update

The VHANOLA Federal Credit Union is open for business and has been temporarily relocated to the Magnolia Credit Union at the VA Medical Center in Jackson Mississippi.

All loan payments have been deferred for approximately six months or until January 30, 2006; so members do not need to worry about making payments at this crucial time. The deferment start date for all members is September 1, 2005 with reference to the date of impact by Hurricane Katrina. The funds from your loan payments will be temporarily routed to your regular share account and made available for withdrawal every pay period during the six month deferment timeframe.

The six months of payments that are deferred will be reallocated on to the end of your regularly scheduled final payment date on any current loans you have with the credit union. Interest will continue to accrue as normal through the six month deferment. There is no special need to apply for this deferment; it has been applied to all loans. A disclosure statement explaining this emergency decision on loan payments will be mailed.

Christmas checks will be issued at the normally scheduled time. Members should contact the credit union staff at (601) 977-8300 Ext. 319; Fax (601)977-8320 to provide a current mailing address.

## Employees must contact VA

**It is imperative that employees who have not contacted VA do so immediately. VA can not continue paying employees, beyond October 1, 2005, who have not made contact with our office through the use of the toll free number, 1-888-766-2474.**

**See page two for a list of employees who have not yet contacted VA.**

## Gulf Coast leadership proud of their employees

Our VA Gulf Coast leadership team is proud of the actions and efforts of our employees before, during and after the storm. From preparation, to weathering the storm, to response and recovery efforts, patient and employee safety came first. It has been mentioned by Ms. Chris Jones, our Associate Director, that "Katrina visited every home on the coast." This was particularly true for the over 400 employees who lost everything, to the over 800 who received damage to their homes.

In the wake of Katrina, every employee continues to deal with traffic congestion, poorly stocked grocery stores, gas shortages, and even almost a month after the storm, misinformation in the community about rebuilding efforts and services. This does not even take into account those of you dealing with clean-up, repair, rebuilding, and insurance issues. To all of you who have done so much in the face of these adversities, we say a collective thank you.

Richard J. Baltz

Acting Director, VA Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System

## Clean up continues on Gulf Coast, salvage operation begins

VA Gulf Coast's facility management staff and Naval Construction Battalion units continue cleaning up Hurricane Katrina debris from the grounds of both the Biloxi and Gulfport divisions.

The Gulfport Division, which was destroyed by the storm, is being fenced off for safety and security purposes.

Facility management has begun to implement a salvage operation. Specific needs are being identified by each service to recover needed items from the Gulfport Campus. Already, a \$400K telephone switch and important fiscal paperwork have been recovered.

Offices on the first floor of every building received devastating damage. There are no salvageable items in those areas.

## New Orleans employee travel advice

Your travel authority is provided for you while you are detailed to your temporary duty station. At this time, your detail is for 120 days. The following are the allowances and restrictions of your travel authority. It is very important to understand that you, the employee, are the only person eligible for reimbursement of travel expenses. Family members are not. Also, you should be aware that **you are not entitled to per diem for any day that you take leave for more than ½ of the daily working hours.**

**PER DIEM FOR MEALS AND INCIDENTALS:** Meal and incidental expenses (M&IE) will be reimbursed at the allowable rate for the locality you are detailed. (You will receive ¾ of this rate for the first day and last day of your detail.) It is your responsibility to advise employee travel of meals furnished at no cost to you while in the shelters or at the medical center. Your per diem will be appropriately reduced according to the number of government provided meals you report.

**LODGING:** The Employee Placement Team is making every effort to locate housing for displaced employees through a national relocation service contract. If the lodging is set up through the contract, VISN 16 will be direct billed for all the housing and you should not have any out of pocket expense for the rent. You may have to pay for utilities. If so, you will need to keep your receipts and file a claim. In most cases, if we are successful in securing housing, there is usually a delay in move-in. Therefore, you will need to arrange for other living arrangements such as a hotel until the contract housing is available and provide receipts to claim reimbursement.

***Travel Advice continued on page 3.....***

## 100% of VA Gulf Coast employees accounted for, VA still waiting to hear from 9% of New Orleans VA employees

Ninety-one percent of New Orleans VA employees and 100 percent of VA Gulf Coast employees have been in contact with the VA after hurricane Katrina. The following is a list of employees who have not yet made contact. If you know the whereabouts of any of these New Orleans VA employees, please have them call 1-888-766-2474.

Adams, Quintelle D	Foster, Alyce L	Luppens, David B	Roach, Nancy L	Soulet, Christine M	Warner, Kathy B
Anderson, Kyle D	Francis, Vernon E	Mack, Linda M	Robertson, Kathleen A	Spencer, Sharon L	Washington, Harold B Sr
Be, Harry	Ge, Lin-Jun	Mansion, Avanette D	Rome, Daniel A	Sullivan, Julia K	Washington, Lionel
Beltran, German S	Gibson, Montrell D	Mar, Charleen L	Rose, Granville	Sylvester, Barry S	Watler, Gloria J
Bethley, Larry	Golson, Anthony K	Martin, Jerome H	Sabatier, Sonia M	Taylor, Vickie A	Watson, Irma L
Blake, Mark H	Gould, Linda A	McEwen, Terri Ann	Sakauye, Kenneth M	Terrell, Geneva D	Welch, George E
Blanco, Elodia M	Gray, Irving Jr	Melgar, Miguel A	Sam, Charles J Jr	Terry, Lisa E	Weyer, Susan M
Borges, Alicia H	Griffin-Bramlett, Ca	Mercado, Ramona	Sanders, Debra	Thomas, Adam A	Wild, Laurianne G
Bowles, Jennifer L	Hartmann, Erica L	Miller, Paula F	Schroeder, Mae F	Thomas, Gerald	Williams, Arthur L
Brazile, Valeria M	Hellstrom, Wayne John G	Mitchell, Marcia S	Sheahan, Claudie M	Thomas, Raju	Williams, Joseph
Briant, Traci A	Henderson, Aaron L	Mosquera, Luis F	Sheahan, Malachi G	Thornton, Jean L	Wilson, Scott C
Butler, Lucretia M	Hill, Marion S	Murphy, Ronald T	Sievertsen, Erik E	Tran, Thien Lan T	Wilson, Venessa M
Caliste, Joanel J	Horton, Steve A	Nakamura, Shawn J	Simoneaux, Celia M	Tuft, Helen A	Witkin, Brian M
Camese, Tanya M	Hunt, John P	Nesbitt, Lee T Jr	Simpson, Estrelita H	Vaughn, Wilbert Jr	Woltering, Eugene A
Carr, Wayne M	Hunter, George	O Bryant, Sid E	Slater, Julia	Walden, Heather M	Young, Aqua B
Castle, Erik P	Jacques, Patricia A	Owens, Larry D	Smith, Aaron C	Walker, Philpatrick D	Young-Cannon, Danielle A
Coleman, Antonia K	Johnson, Dennis E	Payne, Myrtle L	Smith, Charlene M	Wang, Yi-Zarn	Zimmerman, Kate M G
Coleman, Theone Y	Johnson, Michelle A	Peters, Alvin			
Davis, Allan T Jr	Johnson, Michelle D	Pittman, Sonya R			
Debrule, Daniel S	Johnson, Stanley L	Porter, Carlette M			
Deckelman, GERALYN M	Joseph, Joyce L	Porter, Diane R			
Dixon, Funches O	Koenig, Cherie M	Preau, Lynn T			
Dixon, Hubert	Laffitte, Idabell M	Prince, Gwendolyn C			
Dorsey, Ellen D	Larkin, Michael W	Quevedo, Reinaldo J			
Doyle, Mittie K	Le, Kim T	Raibstein-Peralta, L D			
Drewes, Wayne T	Ledoux, Elma I	Reed, Curry J			
Edmunds, John O Jr	Lertora, Juan J L	Reed, Cynthia M			
Epps, Joseph M	Leverett, Tyler	Ricciardi, James E			
Everett, Kenneth L	Lundy, Philip W	Rigby, Peter L			
Ford, Claire A	Lunkins, Kevin	Rivera, Guillermo F			

### About After the Storm

The *After the Storm* newsletter is a publication produced by the South Central VA Health Care Network in an effort to supply updated information to those affected by Hurricane Katrina as we continue to recover from this devastating storm.

This newsletter will be published on a recurring basis. For more information about the publication or to provide story ideas or information, call April Smith, writer/editor, VISN 16, at 601-364-7902.

South Central VA Health Care Network  
1600 E. Woodrow Wilson Drive  
Third Floor, Suite A  
Jackson, MS 39216  
Phone: 601-364-7900  
Fax: 601-364-7996

Network Director—Robert Lynch, M.D.  
Deputy Network Director—Rica Lewis-Payton, MSHA, CHE  
Public Affairs Officer—Mario Rossilli  
Editor—April Smith

## Travel Advice... continued from page 2

**IF YOU ACQUIRE LODGING YOURSELF:** In some cases you may end up making your own housing arrangements and pay for it and claim reimbursement. You will be reimbursed the allowable lodging rate for the locality of your detail. If you do, you must submit your receipts for the rental and other expenses such as utilities and furniture rental if you move into an unfurnished apartment. If you do rent furniture, the following is a list of a standard furniture rental package that we will reimburse.

**Bedroom:** queen frame, mattress, and box springs; chest of drawers; night stand; lamp

**Kitchen:** table and four chairs

**Living Room or Den:** sofa (three cushions or less); chair or recliner; end table; lamp

**Example 1:** You are detailed to Jackson, MS and your apartment rent is \$1,500 a month, furniture rental is \$400 a month, and utilities are \$150 a month. Your total monthly expenses for lodging totals \$2,050 which equals \$68.33 per day based on a 30-day month. The allowable lodging rate is \$60 per day, but can be increased to your actual expense as long as it does not exceed 1.5 times the allowable amount.

**Example 2:** You are detailed to Jackson, MS and your furnished apartment rent is \$1,500 and utilities are \$150 a month. Your total monthly expenses for lodging totals \$1,650 which equals \$55 per day based on a 30-day month. Although the allowable lodging rate is \$60 per day, you will only be reimbursed your actual cost of \$55 per day.

### TRAVEL AND TRANSPORTATION

**Travel to Your Temporary Duty Station:** You will be reimbursed for your travel expenses associated with travel from your current location to the location of your placement. Only you, the employee are entitled to reimbursement. If you fly, take a bus, or train you must submit a copy of your receipt for expenses. If you drive your own vehicle you will be reimbursed \$.485 per mile. You will need to claim the miles driven.

**RENTAL CARS:** We realize that initially you may not have regular transportation to get to and from work. Rental cars have and will be provided on an individual case basis; however, on October 12, 2005, an assessment of rental cars will be conducted to determine the need to continue their approval. You should anticipate the approval of rental cars to end on October 12 and make other arrangements for transportation as soon as possible. If you have a car in the New Orleans VAMC garage please advise Chief Leonard Daniels, Chief Police Service by e-mail of your circumstance and he will make arrangements for you to recover your vehicle. We realize some of you may have lost your car in the storm. Hopefully, you will have had time before October 12 to make arrangements with your insurance company for a replacement.

**TRAVEL CLAIM AND RECEIPTS:** Receipts are not required for meals and coin operated laundry. Original receipts are required for dry cleaning, furniture rental, utilities, etc. Itemized receipts are required for lodging. Receipts for rental property must include the amount of rent, name/address of rental property, dates of occupancy and name, address and telephone number of property managers. Your first travel claim should be submitted no later than October 3 (or other date as specified by the facility). Subsequent receipts must be submitted every 2 weeks, **no later than 5 work days** following the end of the pay period. If you do not submit a claim within this 5 day period, we cannot process your claim and you will not be reimbursed nor will you receive any additional advances. **If you are on leave (Annual Leave or Authorized Absence) for more than ½ day you are not entitled to reimbursement of per diem for that day.**

**ADVANCE OF TRAVEL EXPENSE FUNDS:** If you require an advance of funds for this detail, it will be provided; however, the amount of the advance you receive will be deducted from the expense on your claim. For example, if you received a \$500 advance and your claim for lodging, M&IE and other expenses totals \$1,500, you will receive \$1,000 as your reimbursement. Future advances will not be issued until claims are filed.

**REIMBURSEMENT:** Your travel money will be deposited into the bank account where your direct deposit check goes within 14 days after submission of your receipts. It is your responsibility to check with your bank to see when the money is deposited. If you do not have a bank account you should contact Fiscal Service for other arrangements.